

Harry C. Uhler USAR #18
Nov. 27, 1984

Q: Mr. Uhler, where were you living on Dec. 7, 1941?

A: At Pearl City Peninsula on Oahu.

Q: So you were facing Ford Island, is that correct?

A: Correct.

Q: What was your occupation at the time?

A: I was an appraiser for the Territorial Tax Department.

Q: Were you at your home on the morning of Dec. 7, 1941?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: About what time did you get up that morning?

A: About seven.

Q: Were other members of your household also up about that time?

A: Well, there was only two of us and yes, we were both up.

Q: Who was the other person?

A: My wife.

Q: And her name?

A: "Topper."

Q: Did you have anyone else living on the same property?

A: No.

Q: Did you have houses on either side of your house?

A: Yes, we did.

Q: Do you remember who occupied those houses?

A: Lt. John Probasco.

Q: Do you remember how to spell his name?

A: Jr. Officer and his wife lived on the
other side of our home. I don't recall their names.

Q: Were Lt. Probasco and the other officer married?

A: Yes, they were.

Q: Did they have children?

A: Yes, and pregnant wives.

Q: Both wives were pregnant?

A: Both, including mine.

Q: So, it was a full house then.

A: Full house.

Q: At what point did you become aware that an enemy attack was under way?

A: Just before 8:00 I was on the water side of our yard, watering some grass around a spit that we had constructed outside (tape slips)...heard the sound of this plane coming in (tape slips)... Knowledgeable about airplanes. I knew that it was a plane and it was diving towards the *Utah* which I knew was a (tape slips) My first thought was I was interested in yachting and (tape slips)...they are racing inside Pearl Harbor and the fact that I knew this was a target vessel and I saw what appeared to be a torpedo dropped from the plane. I (tape slips)...for heavens sakes the Navy's gone crazy. They are having maneuvers in the bay and we're going to have a boat race. That shook me a little bit. Just then, there was a tremendous explosion on the side of the *Utah*.
About how far away were you from the *Utah*?

A: A quarter of a mile (tape slips) Then two more planes came down side by side and (tape slips) another torpedo into the *Utah* and (tape slips)... which was a heavy cruiser was moored ahead on the mauka side of the *Utah* (tape slips) Then I looked at the planes and identified the red ball the Rising Sun. I knew that war had arrived, which we had anticipated for some time.

Q: Can I ask you a little bit about the airplanes? What color were they?

A: As I remember, rather a dull gray.

Q: Which direction did they come in from?

A: They came in from the Waianae side these particular ones (tape slips) It was just a matter of moments before we were sending up antiaircraft fire. That's the last look I had at that particular point. I was gathering up women and dogs, and getting them into the car, and one child so we could get out of the area.

Q: What was your wife's reaction?

A: She had been a principal of a school on Ford Island and had been trained in what to do in an emergency such as this. So she wasn't too upset. I turned around and she had come out on our front lanai water side (tape slips). I saw her down. She had been taught to lie down; but she was only kneeling and I thought she was praying. Fact was, she was trying to watch what was going on also.

Q: What about Mrs. Probasaco and the other Navy wife?

A: I gathered those two into the car.

Q: How were they taking things?

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Q: What about Mrs. Probasaco and the other Navy wife?

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Q: How were they taking things?

A: They were a little stunned at first and then of course (ts) their husbands ships were out to sea that particular morning so then (ts) action out there and they didn't know what to expect. They were a little disturbed like all the rest of us.

Q: How about the child?

A: He was just a little guy. He didn't know too much about anything. I carried him around in the cane fields.

Q: Where did you take your group?

A: I went up a cane haul road and went directly up the hill toward Waimano Home, which is a hospital for retarded people. I went partially up that road and got out of the car and went over to the (ts) a ditch and sat in the bank of that.

Q: Do you remember what time it was when you got up there?

A: I would judge, detouring around the other side and warning one of my friends over there, it was 20 to 30 minutes after 8:00.

Q: Why don't you tell me about your detour where you went over to warn your friend.

A: Well, I first went to the yacht club.

Q: Where was the yacht club located?

A: It was on the Ewa side of the Peninsula and (ts) nice club house that had been an old home (ts) land and (ts) fall out area, bringing the boats ashore (ts) a little shanty (ts) pier (ts) every night. She was just coming out of the house, putting on her gloves (ts) church, and I told her that we were at war and she'd better get up in the hills and then the (ts) manager of Pan Am station and American station (ts) from her house came out in his dressing gown and (ts) and I told him and he said, "Oh my goodness! We got a plane coming in from the mainland!" So he disappeared and went back and promptly warned them (ts).

Q: Do you recall the managers name?

A: No.

Q: Did you talk to anybody else at that time to warn them about what was happening?

A: No. Those were the only people that I recall talking to.

Q: When you were taking your wife, and the other women and the little boy up to the hills, why did you feel it would be safer up in the hill?

A: Well, the sky was pretty full of anti-aircraft; you could see the black puffs which were directly overhead and (ts) figured no one would bother attacking just an old plain cane field, and (ts) pretty much out of sight anyhow.

Q: How long did you wait up at the top by Waimano Home?

A: Well, we weren't quite up at the top now, don't misunderstand me; maybe halfway up the hill. We stayed there until about ten. Things kind of stopped and quieted down and planes (ts)

Q: While you were up there were you watching the attack in progress?

A: Oh certainly!

Q: What were some of the things you remember seeing?

A: We saw two planes at different times, shot out of the air and (ts) common knowledge one man mini submarine got in the harbor (ts) cruising along (ts) over in the channel between Ford Island and Waipio Peninsula, which was all cane field then. Somebody detected it, I don't recall. Anyway, they dropped a depth charge on it (ts) blown out of the water and it came out like a broken log. It looked pretty much like a huge log and was broken in the middle. It came up (ts) and dropped back into the water. Of course we didn't know about these one man subs, but we knew it was some kind of underwater vessel.

Q: Did you see any of the American ships maneuvering during the attack?

A: Oh yes, we saw, I believe it was the *Nevada*, trying to get out of the harbor and then (ts) starboard and grounded herself on (ts) tip of Waipio Peninsula (ts) other ships moving around, most of them were already in trouble and they deliberately grounded themselves so they wouldn't sink (ts) but the *Nevada* was the only battleship I remember in it.

Q: What about any of the smaller ships?

A: The smaller ships, they were moving around and some of them were headed out to sea. I couldn't tell you (ts) or sizes of them, but a lot of them deliberately grounded themselves (ts) on it to hang on.

Q: When you were back at your house before you left and you saw the *Utah* being attacked, how many torpedoes did you see strike the *Utah*?

A: Two. If there were more I don't know.

Q: Did you remember what you saw happen to the *Utah* after the torpedoes hit?

A: No, there was certainly nothing happening at that time.

Q: Was the *Utah* still upright when you left your house?

A: Yes, remember this was only a matter of about 10 minutes before we left home.

Q: When you were up on Waimano Rd. and you waited for things to calm down, what did you do at that point?

A: We decided after waiting a reasonable length of time that we'd come back down and go back home and the police stopped us at Pearl City village.

Q: Where was that located?

A: The best landmark would be the Pearl City Inn because that was right on the corner and it was just a wide spot in the road; but there was a little police station there and the police stopped us.

Q: These were civilian police?

A: Yes (ts) . They told us that we couldn't go through at that time and I happened to know one of the officers and I said, "Well shucks, we got a little baby here and we left with nothing. We need some clothes; we need some food." He said, "You can go back but the women may not." And when he agreed to allow me to go back, two ladies came over to me and said, (one of them said) "My father, Admiral (ts) he's still out there. We live in the Tyler House." And she asked me if I knew where that was (ts) mind bringing him back. And (ts) sure. And the other lady said, "My little boy is at the next door house. Would you bring him back?" Of course. So I drove directly to our house. But in the mean time, during the morning, a _____ antiaircraft (ts) company or something who had been on maneuvers the previous week had gone back on (ts). By the time I got back out there (ts) set up again, soldier stepped out with a gun and bayonet and things, stopped me and wanted to know where I was going, and I said, "My home." and he said, "Well, you can't do that." and I said, "Well you go get your boss. I gotta get down there." (ts) called his sergeant. The sergeant came out and I told him my story and (ts) OK you go ahead but I'll go with you. In those days our cars had running boards on them, so he stood on the running board and rode around the corner to our house and went into the driveway. I rushed in and grabbed some clothes, emptied some dresser drawers to use to carry the gear in and (ts) next door to the Probasco home and got some baby food in the kitchen, put that in the dresser drawer (ts) on around to the other house and gathered up some clothing. All the time this Sergeant was running right

behind me with his gun and a bayonet. When I'd back out of the closet I'd bump into the gun and he'd let me pass (ts). About the time I got through picking up "dear", a heavy barrage of anti-aircraft stuff started going up and he said, "You get out of here. I've gotta go back to my post." So, he took off across the field. Then I remembered the Admiral, so I drove over to the Tyler house and the doors were open and I (ts) in and I could see this fellow out on the lanai that was right on the edge of the water, and within 50 yards was a great big ship on fire. And he was sitting in a swing, (one of those old fashioned swings with the chain) (ts) and I said, "Admiral, your daughter wants you to come with me out to the Junction." and he said, "What for?" and I said, "Well, I don't know why. Just will you please come?" So OK he got up. We (ts) out to the car and then I remembered the child. I ran next door. That house was built up off the ground like many of our Hawaiian homes (ts) I ran to the house calling. No answer. I looked under the house and couldn't find the child. Mean time all this shooting was going on; made me a little nervous, and I went back to the car no Admiral. I rushed into the house and I said, "Admiral, what in the world are you doing? You're supposed to come with me!" And he said, "Oh, I forgot my tobacco." (for his pipe). So we got the tobacco, got him back into the car and were driving out off the Peninsula and out to Pearl City Junction. I didn't know what to say, so I said, "Quite a day!" and he said, "Oh, it's all in a day's work." Kind of brushed it off. I figured he seemed like a very old man to me and I was quite reasonably young. I thought maybe he was a little bit senile. Anyway we got out there and unloaded him, told the woman that I couldn't find her child. There was of course tears and troubles (ts). Well then (ts) heard the sound of motors way off towards Haleiwa, Waialua area. Pretty soon we could see coming over the hill a (ts) 10 to 15 planes (ts) right over the top of us. All the people standing around there began to climb under cars, and lie on the ground and one thing or another. They were the last planes that we actually saw. By this time it was almost 12:00.

Q: Do you remember what happened then?

A: Well, we kind of went into a huddle, and I took all of my refugees and went out to Ewa Plantation where my wife's sister lived (ts) and had a big old fashioned plantation house.(ts) pulled up there.

Q: Did you spend the rest of the day there?

A: And night. In fact, we spent a couple days there.

Q: What was the general feeling of the people you were with? Were they apprehensive?

A: Oh very. We didn't know whether there would be an invasion of troops. Well, there was all kinds of wild guesses and rumors and that sort of thing which is typical of a situation like that.

Q: What sort of rumors were floating around?

A: That there were troops trying to get ashore and troop ships. Somebody said they saw a troop ship out to sea. It was probably one of our own Navy vessels.(ts) In order to black out of course, the military governor took over, as I remember, that afternoon. So he was the Senior General that was an army operations (ts) governor. (ts) radio, we got all kinds of orders; one of them was to black out.

Q: When did you finally get back home?

A: (ts) maybe a week or two. We left Ewa Plantation and went to town. My wife's aunt lived up on Halawa Heights. (ts) moved in her house which was too small (ts) for family. A lot of sleeping on the floor and that sort of thing. (ts) did go back about a week afterwards. Of course, the first thing was to look for damage to the house. (ts) couple of wooden shingles that were split where anti aircraft stuff had come down. The yard, you couldn't run a lawnmower on it because it would ruin the blade. The yard was full of it.

Q: Is there anything else about Dec. 7th that sticks in your mind?

A: No, not anything (ts). A lot of things happened of course, but as the years go by you kind of cast those to the side.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing this with me. It's very interesting and of course it's very helpful too. I was wondering if you can recall anyone else who is still here in Hawaii, who had other interesting experiences

A: (ts) Well, I don't (ts) people in town that had different experiences (ts). One thing, (this is kind of a side) Masaji, my close Japanese friend whom I'd gone to warn at the yacht club, he was the boatwright. I didn't see him for almost a month and (ts) the Navy was pretty bitter against Japanese people. But somehow or other, one of our hot shots in the club talked the Navy into allowing Masaji to... the club immediately became the PT boat headquarters and (ts) this had been planned 3 or 4 years prior to the outbreak (ts) allowed him to stay there. So we greeted and I said, "Masaji, when I told you to go to the mountains, you turned around and went the opposite way down towards the pier." He said, "Oh, I went down to lock up my shop." It was just this little wooden 9 x 12 shack and (ts) did have one boat get a bullet that went through the mast. It was a hollow wooden mast. Those were new and quite the thing in those days (ts) than that. It was shrapnel or maybe a bullet, I don't know.

Q: Do you recall Masaji's last name?

A: Tamura.

Q: Well again, thank you. It has been very, very helpful

talking to you.